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# DEPARTMENT OF NURSING EDUCATION

IN CHARGE OF  
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Note: It is evident from reports coming from all parts of the country, that there is a rather marked decrease in the number of applicants to many nursing schools. At the same time there is a marked increase in the demand for well trained nurses. There is no doubt that the root of the difficulty lies much deeper than any temporary shortage of service in this and allied fields, or any lack of public information on nursing. There are certain fundamental defects in this system, itself, which must be cured before we can expect to make any headway with the present situation. No attempt to "boost" nursing without such radical improvements can hope to succeed. It is believed, however, that something might be done by the right kind of publicity—not a cheap newspaper campaign, but a serious attempt to awaken public interest in the whole question of nursing education in relation to public health. The following paper offers some suggestions from the standpoint of a publicity expert.

## WHAT PUBLICITY MIGHT DO TO REMEDY THE SHORTAGE OF STUDENT NURSES

By JAMES RORTY

In discussing the problem of recruiting student nurses, I do not mean to suggest that it is exclusively an advertising or publicity problem. It is fundamentally an economic problem, at least the economic factors are controlling. However, publicity is frequently a most effective instrument in working out economic problems. Given the coöperation of the various groups which are interested both in employing nurses and in training them for service, it seems to me that it is entirely feasible to develop and put through a publicity plan which will not only recruit at moderate expense the large number of student nurses required to meet the growing needs of the hospitals and of the public health nursing movement (50,000 public health nurses, according to Assistant Surgeon General C. C. Pierce, will be required by the Federal and State health legislation already passed), but which will establish in the minds of the public the fact that nurse training schools are educational institutions and that nursing is a *profession* of steadily increasing importance.

For a statement of the problem, I turn to Carolyn E. Gray's article in the September, 1919, issue of *The Modern Hospital* on "The Results of Organized Publicity in Interesting the Public in Nursing." "Education for a profession and for life," says Miss Gray, "is in terms of advertising the goods we have to sell. Looked at from the proper standpoint, we offer education in return for definite work, and this we must stress and emphasize, because any attempt to

attract pupils on any other than an educational basis means, to my thinking, complete failure."

When a manufacturer takes an advertising problem to an advertising agency, the first thing the agent does is to undertake a study of the product, "of the goods he has to sell." Frequently when the agent reports, his first recommendation is that a change be made in the article itself,—that its quality be improved, or perhaps that the package be made more attractive. The advertising agent is the first to recognize that no amount of advertising, no matter how skilfully planned and conducted, can sell a bad product.

Accordingly, if we are applying advertising technique to the problem of selling nursing education, the first thing to do is to study the product, "the goods we have to sell." Obviously the product, i. e., the nurses' education, needs improvement in several respects. One does not need to read the pamphlets issued by the League of Nursing Education to know that the nursing training schools are by no means competing on equal terms with other educational opportunities open to high grade young women with high school, normal school, or college training. The difficulties which the student nurse often has to undergo and the heavy price in routine unskilled service which she has to pay for her training, are well known. Speak to almost any promising high school or normal school or college graduate and she will tell you the same story. "Perhaps the opportunities in nursing are good, but are they worth all the hard work and the long hours of the average hospital course?" Not only do these young women themselves have this feeling about the training schools, but the people to whom they naturally turn for advice in choosing a career,—the high school principals, high school, normal school, and college teachers, all share this feeling and frequently refuse to recommend nursing as a career to their graduates.

Certainly there is at present much ignorance about nurses' training and much prejudice against nursing among possible applicants. Some of this is unfounded and some justifiable. No amount of publicity will change public opinion permanently if actual conditions do not measure up to the picture presented.

We have not only to enlighten the public, but also to guarantee that the majority of nursing schools live up to the specifications which are generally accepted as desirable. The thing to do is to create a public demand for a better product in nursing education and to induce the public to support these higher standards. Publicity will help in this. As soon as the public is assured that the tide has set toward a more enlightened policy in nursing education generally, more applicants will begin to come in, and with this increased number

of students, improvements can be progressively introduced which will hold them and draw others.

Many of the larger schools, driven by the increasingly acute shortage of applicants, are planning or have already undertaken, local publicity campaigns. The advantages of group action are obvious, however. In the first place popular prejudice which now operates to limit the number of applicants is general rather than particular and can be broken down far more effectively by a united campaign which, though prohibitive for a single training school, is easily borne when distributed among all the schools that would benefit by it. Furthermore, it would appear to be entirely feasible for a national publicity bureau, responsible to, or at least controlled in some degree by, the League of Nursing Education, to accomplish a very considerable gain, both in efficiency and in economy, by syndicating general recruiting literature, by pooling experience, and by making a general application of such local recruiting methods as are found to be effective.

The personnel of such a bureau should include, in addition to the director,—two writers, one statistician, and one travelling representative, besides a small stenographic force. Of course, before such a bureau is established the idea must be “sold” and the support of the training schools which will be served by the bureau guaranteed. I would recommend, therefore, the preliminary appointment of a travelling representative who would serve both to sell the plan to the hospitals and to gather data for the use of the bureau when established. Such a preliminary survey would cover a period of perhaps two months. Inasmuch as it is the training schools which are directly concerned in the recruiting problems, it is they and the organizations which represent them, such as the National League of Nursing Education and the American Hospital Association that might logically be expected to take the initiative in organizing the proposed bureau. However, the employing group which, in addition to the hospitals themselves, includes the National Tuberculosis Association, the American Red Cross, the American Public Health Association, and the Council of State and Provincial Health Officers (representing state health departments); also the American Nurses’ Association and the National Organization for Public Health Nursing, may all be expected to coöperate in the work of the bureau even to the extent of contributing to its financial support.

The cost of maintaining such a publicity service can only be roughly approximated, as past experience in recruiting for the nursing profession can scarcely be taken as a guide. However, the campaign to recruit students for the Vassar Training Camp conducted

during the summer of 1918 must be considered unusually successful. A publicity bureau was employed over a period of three months at a cost of \$3,000. The original quota of applicants desired was 500. Not only was this quota achieved, but an additional 500 applicants were secured and distributed to three other training camps. Furthermore, training schools in the vicinity of New York received some of the overflow from this campaign, and even now the effects of this publicity are felt. The total cost of the campaign was \$10,000 and its success is attributed chiefly to the large amount of newspaper and magazine publicity which was secured. Twenty dollars per student is certainly not a heavy price to pay for nursing recruits.

For this bureau when established I should propose tentatively the following functions:

1. The maintenance of a complete publicity service, which would go into every channel of publicity, including motion picture exhibits and would, where desired, furnish information, advice and suggestions on specific problems.

2. Preparation of stock advertising literature and publicity material. I consider it entirely feasible to prepare in quantity recruiting material and supply this material for use in the recruiting activities of the hospitals themselves. The problem here is very much like that of a national advertising campaign. We have to develop our "retailers" system so that it will "collect" on the value of general recruiting publicity. In this system the hospital training school occupies the position of the retailer who advertises locally.

3. A publicity campaign, national in scope, through the newspaper and magazine press, concentrated wherever possible in localities where coöperating hospitals or associations are active and seem to have a chance of benefiting directly from this aid.

4. Publicity support wherever needed in combatting state legislation tending to lower standards, and in advocating desirable legislation.

Without having made a specific study of the problem, I would not wish to prescribe the elements of the publicity material recommended under 2. However, a booklet containing the statement of educational standards indicated as essential earlier in this article, would constitute one element. Another element would be a booklet somewhat similar to that entitled, *Opportunities in the Field of Nursing*, prepared by Isabel M. Stewart of Teachers College. Another element would perhaps be a booklet on public health nursing, such as is now in preparation by the National Organization for Public Health Nursing. A third element might well be a booklet supplied by the Red Cross, describing opportunities created by the Red

Cross program of public health nursing. A poster similar to the poster prepared by the National Organization would probably be desirable. In general it may be said that most of the material required is already written and printed. The problem would be simply one of revision and publication cheaply in large quantities.

Under 4, it will be seen that I recommend publicity rather than advertising. I would in all probability include some advertising which of course always facilitates the task of obtaining space in the newspaper and periodical press. The problem of recruiting nurses is, however, one of sufficient public interest to secure a large amount of free space. The hospital training schools should, of course, be encouraged to advertise individually and help should be extended to them by the service bureau in the way of specimen advertisements.

According to figures given in Miss Gray's article, 15,000 students must be enrolled in the training schools each year to meet the present needs of the hospitals. This number should undoubtedly be increased to meet the need of preparing for service the very large number of public health nurses required by recent legislation and the rapid development of the public health nursing movement.

I have not touched on the methods by which the hospitals would distribute this syndicated literature or how this literature would be supplemented by a folder or booklet specifically describing the advantages of that particular training school. The service bureau would undertake a special study of this problem and recommend outlets for distribution as, for example, high schools, public libraries, women's clubs, religious societies, etc.

In this brief paper I have not undertaken to discuss the considerations which make some such campaign highly necessary at this time. Miss Gray has mentioned the panaceas of "short courses," "lower standards," "increased allowance," which are resorted to when there is a shortage of pupils. It is not only in the training schools, however, that the shortage of nurses is likely to make trouble. At the present time, all over the country the inadequacy of the supply of trained public health nurses is seriously endangering standards of personnel and service. In some states, as for example in Michigan, legislation tending toward the breaking down of standards has been introduced in the State Legislature. When the nurses try to combat these movements, the answer is frequently, "Very well, if you don't want the field opened to 'practical' nurses, then show us some plan of supplying the demand with nurses who come up to your standards.

The foregoing "plan" is, of course, wholly tentative, and is not intended to supply a complete answer to this challenge. I venture to set it forth in the belief that it embodies some of the essential elements

of a feasible recruiting scheme and may, at least, stimulate discussion of what is everywhere conceded to be a very serious problem.

#### DISCUSSION

I. BY CLARA D. NOYES, *President, American Nurses' Association and Director, Department of Nursing, American Red Cross*

A drive of any sort, for the purpose of recruiting pupils for training schools is closely tied to the question of the distribution of these applicants to the schools. Experience in the past has demonstrated that pupils have sometimes been placed in schools of apparently good standing, where both living and educational conditions were so inferior that the pupil could not remain. This, of course, is not always true, but it has been so frequent that it brings forward a very grave and serious question. Such incidents result in discouragement to good applicants and also in harm to the better schools, as the publicity which follows is always conspicuously wide-spread and destructive.

The question that quite naturally arises is whether the three national organizations of nursing should, by their moral support and backing, assist all hospitals conducting schools, regardless of character, or whether the campaign of publicity should be more impersonal and stress education of the public both as to the dignity of nursing as a profession and the vital importance of high nursing standards. At the present moment, when the short term of so-called "intensive training" is occupying the foreground it seems vitally important that a campaign of this nature should be conducted. The public should be shown its responsibility toward the schools of nursing of the country, and what a good school means.

Our Directors of Nursing in the fourteen Red Cross Divisions have a great opportunity through their Committees on Nursing Activities of the Chapters, to bring to large groups of people the question of their responsibility in this direction. Personally, I think it is unfortunate to be constantly bringing forward the fact that fifty thousand public health nurses will be required by the Federal and Public Health legislation already passed. It is discouraging, and if fifty thousand public health nurses were available to-morrow, I doubt whether they could immediately be placed in positions. The Directors of Public Health Nursing of the Red Cross have estimated that they need and have vacancies for, one thousand public health nurses during the next six months. We are naturally concerned with this whole question of supply and the Red Cross is ready to coöperate in any effective method that will help to improve the schools and increase the supply of pupils. Would it not be well to concentrate in some way upon the schools which are prepared to give a good nursing education either within their own walls or through affiliation? It would not appear desirable to help perpetuate so-called schools of nursing that are not prepared or in any way able to give a satisfactory course to pupil nurses.

II. BY KATHARINE TUCKER, *Acting President, National Organization for Public Health Nursing*

The National Organization for Public Health Nursing is devoting the larger part of its efforts to educational and recruiting work designed to reduce in some degree this shortage. It is obviously impossible, however, to supply the very large number of public health nurses required without very greatly enlarging the number of students who are entering the training schools.

The plan under discussion would seem to include very many of the essential

elements, not only from the point of view of the hospital training schools, but from that of the employing groups and the general public. The problem of financing such a bureau would not seem to be insuperable, provided the various interested groups can be induced to unite in the undertaking.

III. *By the President and Several Members of the National League of Nursing Education*

Miss Clayton, "I believe something must be done to attract students to our schools and that many adjustments must be made in our system of education."

Miss Maxwell, "The plan for Publicity recommends itself to me, but one important factor has been quite overlooked. In what other branch of education do we find the student completely fitted upon graduation to enter a very lucrative field of work, a field made ready for almost any branch the applicant wishes to select? In Medicine, the student has to secure hospital practice after four years of expensive study and other professions make like demands. The student nurse secures the theoretical, technical and practical instruction which fits her for immediate usefulness and brings to her a corresponding monetary return almost at once. Much of the repetition of unskilled routine is being done away with and wherever possible the hours are being shortened in the Schools of Nursing. No change that contemplates dispensing with the actual care of the sick can be considered. Our field work in the hospital is the backbone of our profession. The old saying still holds, 'Learn to do by doing,' and nothing less than doing will bring to perfection the work of the nurse. This should be the answer to those who consider hospital work drudgery. It is high time that we got over 'to those to whom applicants naturally turn for advice in choosing a career' the importance of the *invaluable* experience to be obtained in hospital training. The training is not only useful as a profession, but is a preparation for life."

Miss Powell, "I feel that will be a very efficient way of recruiting students, provided the schools that fall below the standard can be kept from using it."

Miss Wheeler, "We need first to find out what other kinds of schools have, which nursing schools do not have, which offers their graduates a better field of service. We need to list all of the reasons why our schools are not attracting students. We then need to make such changes as are necessary to establish an attractive and reasonable standard. Then we need to educate the public to this standard and make good to the advertising of that standard. Then we also need to make executive positions more valuable and attractive, for without the executive we cannot hope to build the school."